Wrestling Observer Newsletter

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The first inductees to the 2012 Hall of Fame class will be Edge and The Four Horsemen, which is a unique issue because that is headed by Ric Flair.

That means that as of right now, they are giving people the impression that a TNA contracted talent will be one of the major draws for a WWE live event, as tickets go on sale soon, with Edge and Flair as the two biggest draws up to this point.

Mil Mascaras was announced in Mexico months ago and should be announced on TV shortly in the U.S. While there are probably four or five more names to be announced over the next few months, that would indicate that The Rock, who most figured would go in since it's in Miami, one of his home towns (he lives in both South Florida and Los Angeles), won't be going in. It is still possible for Randy Savage, but that would almost overload it, as it would make Edge and the Horsemen come off as secondary.

This also would seem to indicate Toronto won't be the home of next year's WrestleMania. Toronto at one point was scheduled for the 2012 Mania, but Miami made a better choice because The Rock was headlining, and it is a strong tourist destination, although nowhere near as historically strong a wrestling market as Toronto. There has also been talk of 2013 being at Cowboys Stadium, using Steve Austin and Brock Lesnar, and perhaps the idea of Undertaker's retirement, as big outside draws. It was considered a given that if Toronto was getting Mania that Edge and Trish Stratus, who are both from that area, would have been the key inductees.

This would be the first time WWE has ever inducted someone contracted to a rival promotion into the Hall of Fame. Plus, it was a decision WWE made, based on all we can tell, without negotiating or working out any kind of an agreement with TNA before making the announcement.

Based on the chronology of events the way it was explained to us, HHH called Ric Flair on 1/9, before it aired. Flair was at the TNA tapings working. HHH told him they were inducting the Horsemen and it would be announced later in the night.

It doesn't appear the key people in TNA were aware of it until it aired on television. Flair and Vince McMahon do talk and I would suspect the subject was broached about a Four Horsemen in the Hall of Fame, because I've heard it discussed over the last year or two, ever since they made amends with J.J. Dillon. Arn Anderson was always someone considered. Arn Anderson was expected for last year in Atlanta, but I guess the idea was the Horsemen as a group, and at that point, with Flair far more prominent and still wrestling on TNA television, not to do so at that time.

Nobody from TNA as of 1/10 had said anything to Flair about it, perhaps because they haven't figured out how they are going to react to it.

There are the a few viewpoints about this one. There is the romantic fan viewpoint that wants to believe this Hall of Fame is like a real Hall of Fame (and there are wrestlers who believe it to be and others who don't, usually depending upon the age of the wrestler, the older

they are, the less likely they see it as anything but business) and TNA would be Scrooges to not let him go.

There are those who believe WWE is using a TNA contracted talent to help sell its event, draw ratings on its TV and help sell DVDs, since at the end of the day the Hall of Fame is purely a marketing device and most in WWE willfully will admit that.

They could also look at it like it only makes their guy look like a big star and it's welcome publicity. And there's a lot of truth to that, but it also makes TNA come across as minor league, but the argument is, everyone sees things that way anyhow.

Another situation is WWE does want Flair back in the fold, particularly when the network launches, since he's featured in so much of the old footage. And really, Flair isn't a key guy in TNA storylines right now, doing nothing but managing Gunner, although at one point they were building to a Flair vs. Garett Bischoff program.

Based on what I'm told, it was a really ballsy move by WWE in the sense that TNA comes across second-rate no matter how they play this, particularly since if it comes down to a fight and Flair goes against orders, he comes across as a hero. If Flair doesn't go because they won't let him and they treat it like he'd be violating his contract, TNA also looks bad.

WWE has not outright said Flair will be there, so at this point they haven't done anything wrong. They have the right to induct anyone they want into their Hall of Fame and the right to use any of the footage they own in marketing.

But they do want Flair there. And Flair wants to be there. Flair was going to go this year to sit in the crowd, even though TNA probably wasn't thrilled about it, if they were inducting people he knew like Edge and Arn Anderson, and he went last year when Shawn Michaels was inducted which WWE pushed hard on its web site. But it's a different thing from a contract issue to go and sit in a crowd at an event and another to be one of the featured performers.

So right now the situation is to see how TNA reacts to this, if they just let it go, or make it an issue with Flair, or an issue with WWE.

The group being inducted will be the third version of the Horsemen, consisting of Flair, Arn Anderson, Tully Blanchard, Barry Windham and J.J. Dillon. As far as working went, they were the best version, four of the top wrestlers in the world in that period. You could argue strongly that Flair and Windham, when that foursome was together, were the two best wrestlers in North America. You could argue that Blanchard & Anderson were the best tag team at that time, although in their case, there would be a much stronger debate because the scene was loaded with great tag teams. But whether they were the best tag team, they were in the debate for the best tag team.

The original version of the Horseman (November 1985 to March 1987) had Ole Anderson in the Windham spot. Ole in the WWE Hall of Fame would be difficult as I wouldn't think he'd participate, plus there is heat between he and several other members of the group, most notably Flair.

Back in the 80s, Ole and Vince McMahon had their court fight over Vince buying a majority interest in Georgia Championship Wrestling. McMahon bought the promotion to get the TBS time slot. Ole was running the company and had no idea of the sale until it went through, and only then he found out his business partners all went behind his back and sold their stock, which

amounted to more than 50%, a majority interest, to McMahon, who essentially closed down the company. Ole said some really nasty things to Linda McMahon at the time. Because of that, Vince told him that he would never work for WWF.

Decades later, when they were doing the Horsemen DVD and wanted Ole to participate, Ole wouldn't do it and actually said that his reason was that Vince told him he'd never do anything with WWF and he didn't want Vince to prove to be a liar. I don't think Ole was considered but most figure if he was asked he would turn it down anyway.

The second version of the Horsemen (February 1987, as there was an overlap when Luger started and Ole was turned on, through the end of 1987) was with Lex Luger, but there was bitterness of how Luger walked out on WWF without telling anyone and showed up on the first Nitro in 1996, resulting in at least Vince attempting and threatening to sue but it went nowhere. At one point it would have been considered impossible for Luger to be in the WWF Hall of Fame, but since Luger's major health issues, a lot of the bitterness is likely gone.

The Windham group was from January 1987 to September 1988. From a business standpoint, the first version was by far the most successful. By 1987, Crockett business was struggling because booker Dusty Rhodes went with a pat hand too young.

Business picked up in 1988, but that wasn't because of the Horsemen, but because Luger turned face and got hot, and Luger vs. Flair in the aftermath of the Great American Bash PPV that year drew big for a while, but Crockett was so deep in debt that he still had to sell. Blanchard & Anderson quit Crockett promotions in September 1988, just before the sale went through, because they were fed up with Rhodes as booker. The key was that when the Turner people took over, they interviewed people in the company asking what the problems were. The interviews were all supposed to be kept confidential. Blanchard in particular buried the job Rhodes was doing as booker, but Rhodes found out and his attitude toward Blanchard changed greatly.

Blanchard & Anderson then signed to go to WWF, which was funny because Rhodes was replaced as booker a couple of months later, then eventually fired and he ended up in WWF with them. Flair, Windham and Dillon remained aligned in WCW until Dillon took a front office job as the Head of Talent Relations for Vince, which ended the Horsemen name, as Flair and Windham were kept together in a group called the Yamazaki Corporation, with the idea that rich Japanese businessmen led by Hiro Matsuda had purchased the American institution of the Four Horsemen. That angle got over about as good as it sounds.

They were going to bring the name back at the end of 1989, with Flair, Ole Anderson, Arn Anderson and Blanchard, but not Dillon, when Flair, booking at the time in WCW, put together a deal to get Anderson & Blanchard back at $250,000 per year, which was more than they were making in WWF as tag team champions. However, right after Blanchard & Arn Anderson gave notice, Blanchard failed a WWF drug test for cocaine and was fired.

Jim Herd, running WCW, then overruled Flair and rescinded the offer to Blanchard, saying they weren't going to hire someone just fired over cocaine by the opposition. While Blanchard wrestled for several more years mostly in a minor league capacity, that pretty much spelled the end of his career as a major performer and he became a religious speaker.

Flair, Ole, Arn and Sting instead became the babyface Four Horsemen, but they quickly turned on Sting, with the idea of building Sting to beat Flair, going back heel, to win the NWA title. But Sting blew out his knee in the angle that turned them heel and that delayed the title change by almost five months as he needed reconstructive surgery.

Ole then retired and in May 1990, the new Horsemen were Flair, Arn, a returning Windham (who had also had an unsuccessful WWF run) and Sid Vicious, with Ole as manager. That fell apart in 1991 when Vicious and Flair both went to WWF.

The name was brought back from May to December 1993 with Flair, Arn, Ole (as a manager) and Paul Roma. There was an attempt to get Blanchard back in the group, but Blanchard and WCW ended up being far apart on money terms and he wouldn't sign.

In late 1995, a new group formed with Flair, Arn, Brian Pillman and Chris Benoit. The plan was for them to break up into two groups, with the Flair & Arn group of the Original Horsemen feuding with the Pillman & Benoit group, the new Horsemen of the Apocalypse. But that never happened.

But Pillman did his Loose Cannon gimmick and the idea fell through.

The next version was Flair, Arn, Benoit and Steve McMichael starting in the summer of 1996. Anderson retired due to problems stemming from a herniated disc in his neck dating back years earlier and worsening, in the summer of 1997, and Curt Hennig was in his spot, but he turned on Flair a month later. Jeff Jarrett was also in the Horsemen for a time.

In September 1998, in one of the most memorable moments in TV wrestling history, Flair returned after a series of lawsuits back and forth with WCW. The new group, starting out as faces, had Arn as the manager of a group of Flair, Benoit, Dean Malenko and McMichael. McMichael ended up being fired by WCW and Flair, Benoit and Malenko went heel in 1999. The final incarnation ended in May 1999 when Benoit & Malenko left the group and broke away from Flair.

With this, Flair is the first person in the WWE Hall of Fame to be inducted twice.